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AUTHOR Fink, Marcy; Arnove, Robert F.
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ABSTRACT

Popular education issues in Latin America--particularly issues manifested in work with women--are examined. Observations are based on work with health education projects in Chile and a regional community organizing program in Honduras, Costa Rica, and Guatemala, as well as research into the impact of popular education programs on Latin American women overall. The case study of Nicaragua was selected to determine to what extent a similar pattern of tensions exists. The six tensions discussed are: (1) methodology vs. content; (2) micro- vs. macro-level focus; (3) reinforcing traditional gender roles or altering them; (4) women-only vs. mixed groups; (5) alternative sector vs. work within the system; and (6) quality vs. quantity. Popular education in Nicaragua is tied to a national political project that aims at the transformation of society. The impact of popular education programs is discussed on an individual level, group level, national level, and the macro level. (24 references) (SI)

CURRENT ISSUES AND TENSIONS IN POPULAR EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA

by

Marcy Fink and Robert F. Arnove

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OEF International
Washington, D.C.

Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana

Introduction

Nonformal and popular education programs have offered disenfranchised sectors in Latin America opportunities for personal growth and socio-economic and political participation. They have played an important role in facilitating the development of collective survival strategies to confront the economic crisis of the 80's in the region. While such programs are quite effective on the community level, there is still great room for linking local initiatives with more macro-level obstacles and opportunities for social participation.

This article will examine some of the principal tensions and concerns faced in popular education work today in Latin America with particular attention to how those issues are manifested in work with women. Our observations are based on work with health education projects in Chile and a regional community organizing program in Honduras, Costa Rica, and Guatemala, as well as research into the impact of popular education programs on Latin American women overall. For purposes of comparative insight, the paper also will examine popular education issues in a society undergoing radical change. We have selected the case of Nicaragua, with which both authors are familiar, to determine to what extent a similar pattern of tensions exists. As with the other country analyses, we will focus on how popular education programs affect the status of women.

Defining Popular Education

While at times the terms "nonformal education" and "popular education" are used interchangeably in Latin America and the United States, a distinction should be made due to the role popular education identifies for itself in processes of social and structural change. Differences are implicit in their nomenclature: "nonformal education" puts emphasis on the mode of learning, while "popular education" focuses on the sector involved. According to Chilean author Jorge Osorio, "Popular education can not be defined only by the modality it assumes as an educational process (out-of-school or not), nor by the didactic methods, techniques and procedures it employs, but rather by its class character." (Osorio, March 1988:14)

There is no commonly agreed-upon definition of "popular education," rather, but two components seem key: the pedagogic and the political dimensions.

In the pedagogic arena:

— Popular education proposes a methodology for learning which is participatory and egalitarian ("horizontal" is a common term used), intending to eliminate the power component of the educator's role.

-- Popular education is aimed at developing among popular sectors a "critical consciousness" and understanding of how society functions. It is often combined with skills training in which two levels of knowledge are valued: 1. the traditions, knowledge, abilities and experiences of learners and 2. the transmission of new skills and information.

In the socio-political arena:

-- Popular education programs work with those sectors of the population which are marginalized due to their socio-economic status. Hence, women, unemployed youth or adults, peasants, and indigenous groups are commonly the participants.

-- Popular education processes facilitate the active involvement of participants in social change efforts as subjects in the historical process and not passive observers to it.

-- Popular education is part of a broader process of social change aimed at building social movements and transforming society; it is a tool in the forging of a more just society.
(Fink, 1988:9)

Tensions in Popular Education

By its very nature popular education is constantly being redefined and re-evaluated. The following tensions within the practice and vision of popular education are raised to promote further discussion and debate about its purpose and role, in the belief that these issues reflect the concerns of practioners and their debate will increase the effectiveness of such efforts. The six tensions to be discussed are:

* Methodology vs. Content
* Micro vs. Macro Level Focus
* Reinforcing Traditional Gender Roles or Altering Them
* Women-only vs. Mixed Groups
* Alternative Sector vs. Work Within the System
* Quality vs. Quantity

1: Methodology vs. Content

Learning involves both content and method. It is not only what you learn about, but how you learn it that makes people able to use that knowledge effectively. In popular education, methodology is key because it is designed to develop participatory skills and democratic practices within the learning environment. The learning environment, then, is a testing ground for all the ideas about social justice and equality that we want to put into practice in society at large. Paulo Freire articulated this idea when he called education "la práctica de la libertad," or the practice for freedom, in that new egalitarian roles and cooperative workstyles can be enacted. As one organizer put it,

> Our means for planning and carrying out our programs are actually our ends in the making, and if they aren't

students from indigenous groups and lower social strata. Yet one does not want to reproduce this phenomena in educational settings that purport an alternative.

Several health professionals acting as popular educators reflected on their own training, expressing dismay with the standard, top-down, professional-as-expert approach. This role is difficult to unlearn, and sometimes even to recognize. We are not proposing, however, that health educators and professionals deny that they have had access to particular knowledge and information. One of the myths of popular education is that educators and learners becomes equals if the instructor denies his/her own experience and history. Differentiation does exist, although one can certainly work to eliminate its power component.

If educators can be said to be "guilty" of falling into traditional pedagogic practices, it is certainly facilitated by participants who assume traditional student roles. Having been socialized in the same system, there is often initial difficulty in responding to a participatory methodology, perhaps even resistance. Further, denied educational access and adequate social services, participants want new knowledge. Accentuating this is the fact that in this case the educators involved are often health professionals — nurses, doctors or midwives -- and the status and power that such roles traditionally connote create an even more difficult dynamic to overcome.

Given the heavy content orientation of the health field, and the socially power-laden roles of health professionals, debate over the appropriate balance between content and methodology needs to continue. Such an exchange will help clarify both project goals as well as the purpose of popular education.

In popular education work with women, the method/content tension manifests itself a bit differently. In its early days, the development of a "critical consciousness" was the primary concern of popular education programs, but in recent years that has changed, and it is generally combined, now with the acquisition of more concrete technical skills. Described by Suzanne Kindervatter, "Today's programs are moving beyond 'conscientizacion' in order to foster the skills needed to solve problems once they have been analyzed." (Kindervatter, 1988:41)

This change is partly in response to the economic crisis faced in Latin America today, where the standard of living has declined drastically, and survival in 1989 is harder than it was 10 years ago. Women feel that brunt in many ways as the head of household in a large portion of families in Latin America and generally being the primary person responsible for attending to children and domestic concerns. Studies have shown that many of the gains women made in the 1970's in terms of participation in the labor force and greater access to education were reversed by 1985, when unemployment levels soared and the decline of social and public services put new demands and burdens upon them. (Ramirez, 1988:36)

As a result, programs with an educational or consciousness-raising emphasis found it more difficult to draw in participants, and the emphasis on productive and economic projects grew. According to Angela Hernandez from Mujeres en Desarrollo Dominicano (MUDE) of the Dominican Republic, this has created a great challenge for popular educators who do not want to lose the socio-political dimension of the work to stress only immediate needs. It is important to be responsive to women's needs, she maintains, but also to develop other skills, both analytic and practical which will give them greater long-term control over their own lives.

The most recent technical or content focus has been on income-generating and small enterprise projects for women, entailing skills related to carrying out feasibility studies, managing businesses and marketing products. Much effort has been dedicated to seeking successful formulas and components to such programs. In addition to the need for resources and technical skills, participatory and decision-making skills are identified as essential in enhancing women's contribution in any signficant way and these very much rely on attention to methodology. Based upon her study of 31 development agencies, both international and Latin American, Nelly Stromquist contends that,

> The success of these projects is characterized not only by the attainment of profits by participating women, but also their involvement in decisions regarding the functioning of the project instead of being mere beneficiaries. (Stromquist, 1986:6)

The tip towards content over methodology and critical thinking is a concern among many educators who recognize that empowerment entails much more than new knowledge and information. Perhaps one of the principal differences between nonformal education and popular education programs is this: the former sees skills and economic advance as the primary solution to women's marginalization, while popular education sees the development of a critical consciousness as a precursor to effecting substantive change.

#2: Micro vs. Macro Level Focus

The micro-macro tension can be framed in a number of ways. It can also be termed the local vs. national/policy level emphasis, or the tension between short-term and long-term needs.

In analyzing the condition of women, popular education work is probably weakest in linking local level activities to the national policies which affect them. The micro or project-focussed orientation consumes much energy and while it certainly builds individual and group skills, it often fails to adequately address broader issues such as laws, policies, custom, social norms and economic systems which inhibit women's full contribution to society and national development.

Low-income women, rural and urban, often lead an isolated existence, when single bound to their families by custom, and when married, bound to

their homes by household and childrearing responsibilities. Popular education sessions often become a primary meeting place for women, offering a support group and sense of community. They provide a means for women to share the daily concerns and problems they face. The chance to break out of the daily routine and sit down with others helps women recognize they are alone, that their problems are shared, and upon further exploration, that the root causes go beyond individual fault or responsibility. Slowly such reflections move people from an individual to a collective perspective and the potential for a political consciousness. These processes reflect one of the greatest strengths and successes of popular education work.

However, in her writing on the role of nongovernmental organizations in empowering women, Nelly Stromquist identifies the need to move from immediate local concerns to greater audiences and macro-level impact. She uses Maxine Molyneux's distinction between "practical gender interests" and "strategic gender interests" in which the former are "... short term and linked to immediate needs arising from women's current responsibilities vis-a-vis the livelihood of their families and children, while the latter addresses bigger issues such as the institutionalized forms of gender discrimination, the establishment of political equality, freedom of choice over violence and control over women." (Stromquist, 1986:19)

One example of efforts to bridge that gap is Margaret Schuler's work around women, the law and development. Schuler addresses 'strategic' interests by identifying the legal system as a tool for reinforcing women's subordination which has the potential to be an instrument of social transformation. Her analysis of the relationship between the law and socio-economic development processes which have kept women marginalized opens new strategies for empowerment: legal rights programs which educate women about their rights, redress grievances and work to change discriminatory legislation and policies. (Schuler, 1986: 5) They aim to demystify the legal system, develop the skills to utilize it where possible, challenge it or subvert it where necessary, redress injustices and access economic and political resources (Schuler, 1986:1).

A number of women's groups throughout the continent have acted as advocates in this arena by working to eliminate the more institutional roots of women's subordination and using popular education methodologies as a tool in the process. Groups like Peru Mujer and the for Center Women's Action and Promotion (CEPAM) in Ecuador have educated and mobilized around issues such as domestic violence, discriminatory labor codes and practices, and inheritance and family law with the dual intentions of building grassroots efforts and enacting change on the superstructural level.

Popular education is an important tool in demystification efforts, by translating the language of legal specialists into terms that can be understood by women with minimal schooling. Using comic book style booklets and boardgames, role plays and theater, women can learn-by-doing about specific laws and policies which affect them. In Peru,

community women are trained as "legal promoters" who serve as a resource to and advocate on behalf of their neighbors. Through a range of educational activities, women discover their power to act in defense of women's rights, to speak in public without fear of criticism, and to deal with police and judicial authorities. (Dasso from Schuler, 1987: 228)

It is of particular interest that these efforts often bring together academics, lawyers, psychologists, community activists, and low-income women in a joint cross-class and interdisciplinary project. These efforts promote change on the policy level (legal, institutional, governmental) and actively involve grassroots womens' groups in the process. The combination of individual change and superstructural change enhance prospects for women's empowerment and the possibility of a long term impact. Still, while these efforts may reflect growing frustration with the limited impact of project-specific economic projects which target women, they are not yet representational of the kinds of educational and development work going on with women.

Another case of grassroots mobilizing which attempts to make the national policy link is an environmental project in Costa Rica. In a semi-rural community outside of San José threatened by water pollution, soil erosion and deforestation provoked by a construction project, the Committee to Defend the Hills of Escazú was formed by small farmers in 1985. Using popular education as a primary tool in community mobilization efforts, this committee expanded into seven surrounding "cantones" or districts. Part of its strategy has been to pressure government agencies and the legislative assembly for a strict law that will protect these hills, and as a result the people who live throughout the area. Educational efforts have served to demystify the policy-making process and involve an array of sectors in trying to understand how the land can best be protected and what type of laws would be in their interest.

The health education work observed in Chile stands in contrast. Many (though not all) of the educators tended to examine nutrition and other health practices in a narrow context with a strong emphasis on information and skills. Their approach tended to reinforce the assumption that individuals bring about their own health problems and that changes in attitudes and behaviors are the main goal of the work. This is not to say that changes in attitude and behavior are unnecessary or unworthy, but they should be placed in the context of more significant socio-economic changes.

In many of the health education programs observed, the "politics of health" was not given the attention it merits. The very process of popularizing health knowledge and skills is a political one, implying their expropriation from the exclusive domain of health professionals. This is not accomplished by merely imparting knowledge to popular sectors. It should be accompanied by a critical understanding of why an exclusionary process occurs. Issues of preventive and curative approaches to health care fall in this discussion, as well as the question of whether health care should be a "right" or a "privilege." It implies recognition that the inferior health of poor people is in great

part a result of the social system. A key goal then of popular education work would be to help people acquire the comprehension and skills necessary to alter the conditions which cause poverty and poor health (Werner and Bower, 1982).

#3: Reinforcing Traditional Gender Roles or Altering Them

A range of collective survival strategies have emerged in Latin America to respond to the economic crisis and compensate for the public and social services which the State has ceased providing; the "ollas communes" and "comedores populares" (collectively run soup kitchens) and "botiquines" (first aid stations) in Peru and Chile are clear examples. Such strategies have a strong popular educational component. According to Colombian researcher and educator Socorro Ramirez,

> Women from low-income sectors have increasingly joined together to provide all types of health, training, education, cultural and recreational services, as well as attention for the handicapped and children, building of housing, collecting and recycling of garbage, managing environmental problems, building plumbing systems, etc.
>
> These organizations respond to the needs of the community as well as to the individual needs of women as participants in the community. In the majority of cases, the organization's work is voluntary, and not paid. While these activities represent a greater workload for women, paradoxically this situation also provides women with the opportunity to break their isolation and confinement to the home, and to discover their social utility.
> (Ramirez, 1987:39)

In spite of the impressive accomplishments of many of these organizing and educational efforts, there has been concern about their tendency to reinforce womens' socially determined roles in the domestic arena because so many of them focus on the household, children, food, and health. According to Socorro Ramirez, "... Actions which are designed solely to obtain better conditions in which to carry out traditional work help women to survive a crisis, but at the same time reinforce the sexual division of labor. When the crisis passes, women return to their traditional subordinate roles. Their enormous assistance in overcoming the crisis doesn't enable them to attain full social and political citizenship." (Ramirez,1989:40)

There is a need to understand womens' specific needs and forms of subordination, and foster the development of nontraditional skills. Some of the work being done recently around economic projects, small enterprise development, and in the training of legal promoters begins to offset that concern, but the tough question remains: How to meet the

immediate needs of women and families but also broaden their horizons and potential?

Popular educational efforts which organize people to confront economic hardship also tend to develop participatory and critical thinking skills. Dire circumstances may reinforce some traditional gender-related areas but they can also be maximized to develop women's leadership skills, strengthen local organizations, and build networks among groups, hence provoking a broader impact on women. This may not move women from the home into the national arena directly, but certainly constructs the building blocks for broader forms of participation.

Specific programs aimed at developing female leadership exist toward that end. Members of the National Confederation of Women Peasant Farmers (CONAMUCA) in the Dominican Republic regularly participate in a training program for preparing women leaders sponsored by a local nongovernmental groups, the Center for Research for Women's Action (CIPAF). There, women with a formal educational background ranging from functional illiteracy to a high school degree have the opportunity to develop analytic capabilities such as the analysis of the role of rural women in Latin American and Caribbean economies and practical skills like educational methods for building democratic participation.

#4: Women-only vs. Mixed Groups

Latin American social movements and organizations have consciously incorporated processes and methodologies of popular education into their daily work. This is evident within youth and shantytown movements, cultural movements, unions and peasant association, women's organizations, Christian communties, cooperative movements, and political parties. The educational process is initiated with direct links to political and economic change.

Women may be involved as members of mixed organizations such as cooperatives and peasant unions or through all-women's organizations. Overall, however, in mixed social and political organizations women tend to be underrepresented, and even where they are present in large numbers they are generally not in positions of leadership.

Many feminists contend that such groups pay inadequate attention to issues of sexism and gender subordination in both society at large and the groups themselves. Although women have become active in social movements,

> ... this participation has not been exempt of multiple limitations and difficulties derived just as much from contradictions in the domestic sphere as in the popular organizations and institutions where mechanisms which subordinate women to men are still reproduced and, as a result, traditionally assigned male and female roles are maintained. (Rocero, 1987:10)

Feminist critics contend that popular education work posed within the context of social movements often does not pay sufficient attention to gender-specific oppression, relegating such issues to secondary importance in light of class issues. Minimization of the gender dimension has led to debates as to whether it is more effective to work within mixed organizations or focus on all women's groups. Some argue that an all-women's orientation runs the risk of setting up small isolated women's groups, marginalized from affecting more mainstream efforts. Such groups may not be taken seriously and considered too radical or limited in their focus if they are not part of a more integrated effort to incorporate women and change male perspectives at the same time.

There is evidence to show, however, that women need a space among themselves to develop participatory skills. Social science research indicates that because of internalized social expectations, individuals with a social status of low prestige, tend to participate much less in group discussions and decisions than those having high status. In order for women to develop some of the skills which men already having, particularly related to leadership, public speaking, and organization, women's groups provide a more effective starting point. (Stromquist, 1986: 15) Interviews with female participants and observation contrasting women in mixed groups and all female settings support this notion.

Sally Yudelman carried out an in-depth study of five women's organizations in the Caribbean and Latin America, maintaining that they offer women "... the opportunity to acquire knowledge and trust in themselves in a favorable environment and dispel general myths about women's function in society. Such organizations facilitate women's access to resources and permit them to assume increasing economic and political responsibilities." (Yudelman, 1987:1)

Generally, though, there is some agreement that integrated vs. women-only projects is not the question, but rather the approaches can be complementary.

> Given the complex situation of poor women and the diversity of the political and cultural contexts in which they live, a combination of both approaches is advocated to ensure that, on the one hand, some critical skills are developed and, on the other hand, that women's needs and problems are not "ghettoized." The challenges ahead are to determine when to promote which type of project and how to make sure that the "integrated" projects do not mean absorption to the point of invisibility for women.
> (Stromquist, 1986: 17)

#5: Nongovernmental Sector vs. Work Within the System

We have made many critical observations in these pages without giving

attention to the difficulties implicit in carrying out popular educational work in different settings. In Chile today this concern is extremely relevant. Numerous health professionals and social workers who were employed by the Allende government in 1973 lost their jobs or suffered other forms of repression following the military coup d'etat. Many of these individuals constitute today the "alternative", nongovernmental sector of intermediary institutions which offer social programs and do socio-economic research. Interestingly, this nongovernmental arena is a very extensive one within Chile today, surviving largely on international funding. Although political and economic limitations exist, there is a fair amount of flexibility in implementing innovative and participative projects.

What is the role of those who continue functioning within the public sector such as community clinics? Working within the system to propose a new and critical concept of health carries risk, and concrete cases exist in which those who carried the task too far have lost their jobs. Community participation and the decentralization of power pose a threat to the system, as does any critical analysis of health conditions and the responsibilities of the government.

Still, work within public institutions does have certain points in its favor, even if there are limitations. First, there is the opportunity to reach a larger portion of the community, probably those who are poorer and/or less organized. Secondly, it offers the chance to do some education among co-workers, by sharing different attitudes and approaches towards health care. The tradeoff may be worth it if such inroads can be made.

In the case of the Costa Rican environmental project, a conscious decision was made to maximize governmental involvement, both as target of educational work and as a fundraising source, exemplified by the tapping of the Institute for Social Security for financial donations. Of course, in organizing around ecological concerns this may be more feasible than in other kinds of mobilizing projects which present a greater threat to the state.

Similar issues can be raised in contrasting the impact of popular education with formal education on women, equating popular education with the alternative sector and schooling with the public sector. Popular education is not to be viewed as just an alternative to formal schooling; in fact it cannot and should not fulfill many of the functions of the school system. Rather, it posits a critique of the school system as a center for socializing people and reinforcing and reproducing the current system of social and class relations.

Statistics in Latin America are clear in showing that women's opportunities through the formal school system are minimal: one out of every four adult women is illiterate and only 65% of girls between 5 and 19 years of age are in the primary or middle school system. (Vicioso, 1988:87). We do know, however, that women are primary participants in the nonformal literacy programs of Latin America, constituting 70-80% of

learners, offering them the basic skills they were unable to obtain in the formal system, and providing a minimal point of entrance for enhancing their economic opportunities. (Stromquist, 1986:4) Still, in that a correlation exists betweeen formal educational achievement and greater employment possibilities, formal schooling offers women some opportunity to better themselves economically.

We cannot deny that in society today formal schooling provides social legitimacy. Although the recent emphasis among nonformal and popular education programs on offering women income-generating skills may prove beneficial, they do not provide women the same legitimation, neither in the eyes of participants nor society at large as a formal degree. Popular educators in Central America attest to this, saying that for most poor women, "education" is equated with the school itself, so at first it is hard for them to validate nonformal education opportunities and make a commitment to attending sessions. Still, "... once women begin to feel like active participants, then the process becomes more significant than the formal school."

The need for such legitimation is evidenced by the frequency with which "certificates" attesting to participation in a particular course or workshop are offered by popular education programs. While they have no real formal value, they give needed recognition to the participant's achievement.

While there is no study which looks comparatively at the value of formal and nonformal educational programs for low-income women, it would be of interest to see if women's participation in nonformal and popular education programs expand the formal educational opportunities sought for their children, and particularly daughters, be it due to parental awareness and new attitudes, or the result of improved economic welfare.

#6: Quantity vs. Quality

This dilemma concerns two tendencies within popular education programs: to offer programs of short duration (4-8 sessions) trying to reach a larger number of participants by working with more groups, or to have a longer more intensive program concentrating on a smaller number of participants.

It is obvious that it is almost always preferable to choose more over less of a service, and that the service be of good quality. The problem is that given a scarcity of human and economic resources, what is the best way to use them to achieve program objectives.

Programs of shorter duration are not necessary of inferior quality. What should be considered, however, is how much can be achieved in a matter of weeks, considering the multifaceted goals of popular education. If the transmission of knowledge were the only intention, shorts programs might be adequate. However, the development of participatory skills and a critical way of thinking are abilities which develop over time. That

entails developing the self-confidence of participants, unlearning many socialized attitudes about knowledge and participation, and internalizing new conceptions. If a popular education methodology is consensed into a brief course, learners may manage to reproduce it in a rote manner, but that misses its essence as a viable and liberating alternative.

The quality of the facilitator-participant relationship is also an important variable in developing an effective program. While the rapport observed among educators and participants was generally warm and open, in some of the health education programs, the facilitators didn't even know the names of the women they were working with. Given the number of groups and the brevity of the session, this was understandable, but the limitations are also clear.

Much of what goes on in the affective and interpersonal domain takes place outside of sessions, either before or afterwards when informal, spontaneous discussion occurs and people take time to just chat and relax. After one health session observed in Chile, one of the more outspoken and assertive women participants began to talk about problems that she and her husband were facing. Usually a rather gruff person, she expressed vulnerability, indicating a trust of the facilitators and remaining participants. Yet time limitations cut short the discussion; other commitments were pending. The busy schedule which many popular educators maintain curtails this essential level of communication.

There is no doubt that a variety of factors shape choices about resource utilization. One is budget size and the demands of the sponsoring organization, another is the number of staff involved. The context within which falls the educational experience and its relation to other community activities is also key. If a program is intended as a temporary intervention to supplement the ongoing work of a group or groups, a program of short duration might be adequate.

In any case, choices between depth or quantity should be conscious ones that develop as part of the analysis of group needs, goals and interests, along with program resources. An important consideration should be the kinds of follow-up and ongoing support an outside facilitating organization is prepared to offer. Generally some follow-up is needed, be it training, communication, or campaigns which put learnings to practice, but often it is not available.

It is also important to analyze whether educational support offered by intermediary organizations (national ngo's) or popular educators from outside the community is promoting dependency or really facilitating community self-reliance. This tension between dependency and autonomy is prevalent in many popular education programs and deserves more attention and analysis. Practically speaking, complete self-reliance is at best a long term goal. Given the social distribution of resources, it may be more realistic to recognize that some outside assistance is acceptable, with focus on ensuring local groups the skills to access resources and the power to administer and control them.

Critical to this discussion is the role and training of local popular educators, commonly called "monitors" or "promoters" . The preparation and training of local people to carry on the educational/organizing work within their groups and communities is essential to ensuring that the so-called "multiplier effect" of popular education really occurs. Skills must be demystified, shared, and appropriated by people from community level organizations. The preparation of local popular educators and leaders is predicated upon the belief that knowledge should not be the privilege of a minority or of "specialists" be they educators or doctors or lawyers and true empowerment is only attained as marginalized sectors gain the skills and power to take their problems into their own hands.

Participants attest to the value of learning from and with their neighbors. One 54 year-old Chilean woman describes it:

> It's very important for people that the teachers speak just like you. You don't have to feel restrained, as if you didn't have the right to speak because your language and vocabulary aren't like other people's.. . In the schools, only the teacher speaks and no-one else. ... In our meetings we bring the newsprint and we say, 'Let's talk about x, we want to know your opinion. What do you think about this, what do you think about that? We learn from each other. ... And the fact that they shared their knowledge makes them feel important; they feel like they've been taken into account, that as human beings they've mattered. (Fink, 1986:7)

In conclusion, the quality-quantity dilemma has many facets, from time to depth to who actually educates. In our estimation, these are some of the key issues before popular educators and theorists at this time. The practical reality of popular education is often further from theory than we should accept. There are always reasons and justifications for this, but an honest, self-critical analysis can bring practitioners closer to the praxis espoused.

Popular Education in a Revolutionary Society

By contrast, an examination of popular education in Nicaragua suggests a different, almost opposite pattern of problems from those of either reactionary or reformist regimes in Central and South America. Popular education in Nicaragua is explicitly tied to a national political project that aims at the transformation of the society. The new system of popular education as current Ministry of Education publications note "is essentially and necessarily linked to the strategic political project of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). What is fundamental in it is the fact of being part of the political project for the building of a new society. Popular education is not a new form of education or a mere act of political will, but an overall notion of education in keeping with a Weltanschauung and a political project. It is this political project of ours that lends it its full significance." (MED, 1986: 4)

While the Ministry of Education refers to the entire system of formal and nonformal education as constituting a system of popular education--in which, according to Valerie Miller (1985:30), the great majority of the formerly dispossessed and socially excluded people are the active protagonists of their own education--the term more specifically refers to those educational activities associated with the 1980 national literacy campaign; the follow-up program of adult basic education (Educacion Popular Basica, EPB) conducted under the auspices of the Vice-Ministry of Adult Education (VIMEDA); and the educational programs conducted by various state institutions (e.g., the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Land Reform, and the Ministry of Health) and mass organizations (i.e., the Sandinista Youth Organization, the Committees for Community Development, the Rural Workers' Association, the Sandinista Workers' Central, the National Association of Nicaraguan Teachers, and the Nicaraguan Women's Association "Luisa Amanda Espinoza").

By far EPB constitutes the most extensive and institutionalized form of popular education outside the formal school system. This follow-up program to the national literacy campaign takes the organizational form of educational collectives (Colectivos de Educacion Popular, CEPs). EPB relies principally on Sandinista mass organizations and nonprofessionals as the agencies of continuing education. Many of the more than 15,000 (at its peak, 18,000-20,000) teacher animators of popular education are graduates of the literacy campaign with approximately one-half of CEP instructors having less than a complete primary education.

This volunteer and youthful teaching force, using inexpensive print material in a variety of classroom settings, by 1984, had enabled basic education to reach approximately 190,000 Nicaraguans in some 17,000 educational collectives. Ideally, EPB is supposed to comprise a community-based, adult-oriented education, using innovative educational methods that will empower individuals to participate collectively and consciously in the tasks of national reconstruction.

In addition to the educational program of VIMEDA, many of the state and mass organizations have instituted their own education divisions to upgrade the level of technical knowledge and organizational skills of their staffs and membership, and raise political consciousness. Almost all are involved in training popular educators who serve as change agents (community and union organizers) disseminating vital information on a mass basis in the areas of health and nutrition, women's and worker's rights, occupational safety, land reform and cooperatives, civil defense, and current events of national import.

Despite much innovative work and significant achievements in educational provision, consciousness-raising, and the imparting of skills and knowledge essential to transformations in the workplace, community, and family, there have been a number of serious limitations and shortcomings in popular education in Nicaragua. Many of these problems stem from efforts to accomplish more than is possible with existing personnel and resources in a wartime situation. Others derive from the conflict-generating process itself of a revolution that attempts to mobilize

large-numbers of people around long-term projects envisioned and guided by a vanguard party (i.e., the FSLN), that at the same time is committed to the empowering of the people to shape the course of Nicaraguan society and history.

In comparing the Nicaraguan case to the tensions that were noted in the previous sections--the need, for example, to achieve balance between an emphasis on content and skills on the one hand and an emphasis on process and consciousness-raising on the other--we discover a tipping of educational policy and practice in the opposite direction of those patterns found in popular education projects, particularly those in the health field in countries like Chile. By contrast, popular education projects in Nicaragua have tended to emphasize process over content; consciousness-raising over skill-building; the macro- over the micro-level, long-term strategic interests over immediate, pratical concerns; and the public sector over the private sector. Moreover, the women's issue--of single-sex vs. mixed-sex groups--and strategies for improving the status of women take on a different dynamic in a revolutionary society such as Nicaragua that is both simultaneously attempting to pursue a different path to development--based on the "logic of the majority"--and fight internal subversion and external aggression that threaten the survival of the political regime. These emphases have occasioned problems and a desire on the part of those involved in designing and implementing popular education to move towards a greater balance in the goals, content, and methods of the programs.

With regard to the tension between process and content, as popular education is part of the political project of the FSLN, emphasis has been given to consciousness-raising in order to prepare people for new roles in a new society and also to help legitimate and consolidate a revolutionary regime under seige. However, what has been viewed as a strength of popular education -- thousands of minimally schooled volunteers serving as teachers -- also may be a serious shortcoming. Many instructors, in fact, are only one step ahead of their student neighbors and friends. At the upper levels of EPB, the abilities of popular educators appear to be stretched beyond the breaking point. Moreover, despite claims of using participatory teaching-learning methods, most teachers without adequate preparation, simply resort to traditional methods of instruction. Another concern is high dropout and burnout rates for both students and teachers, with less than half the students completing the third level of EPB, and approximately one-third of teachers leaving the program.

Popular education, like the literacy crusade, was initially considered by the Sandinista leadership as a political project with educational implications--the nature of adult education never being very clearly defined. The lack of clear definition and design has resulted in what was supposed to be a parallel education system closely tied to community and workplace needs gradually beginning to resemble in some respects traditional schooling--namely, a bureaucratic, centralized, credentialling system not closely tied to local circumstances and learner needs.

The nature and future direction of adult education, therefore has aroused serious concern among members of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Planning (which oversees educational policy in relation to economic and social plans of the nation), and the leadership of the FSLN. Reforms in adult education, however, are now taking place. Plans are under way to reduce the program from 6 to 3 levels of instruction, which will facilitate graduates entering technical training sooner. Adult education teachers are being trained through their inservice workshops to add a general technical content at even the initial introductory (literacy) level. In 1987, Ministry of Education (MED) and the Sandinista Workers' Central (CST) reached an agreement by which CEPs will be organized in the major factories of Managua. MED will supply materials and teacher training and CST will design the factory-specific technical content to be included with the language and mathematics instruction. Similar agreements also are under way between MED and the Association of Rural Workers (ATC) to introduce workplace related content into the popular education materials used on state farms. Basic reading and writing and computation skills, in themselves, comprise urgently needed technical skills for union workers to maintain their books, and, for example, calculate wages as a percentage of profits for negotations with state or private sector.

Some of the more promising efforts at literacy and post-literacy instruction involve the National Union of Ranchers and Farmers and the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Agrarian Reform (MIDINRA), in which literacy instruction is in relation to the specific skills needed to govern and conduct the activities of a cooperative or to increase agricultural production. Examples of experimental work-site experiments include that of the state-run Benjamin Zeledon Sugar Mill in Carazo, where workers who had completed the first two levels of EPB were enrolled in a 45-day course of full time study with pay which was designed to enable them to complete the third through fifth levels of adult education and enhance their technical knowledge.

The issues of level (macro/micro), sector (public/private), and strategy (immediate/long-term) take on a different configuration in a revolutionary society such as Nicaragua. The most controversial and contradictory aspects of popular education in societies undergoing radical change within a socialist framework, in our judgment, pertain to notions of empowerment—to the thesis of individual and collective empowerment within a political projects that is defined by a vanguard party. As a MED (1986: 4) document notes: "One of the fundamental points (concepts) of popular education fully coinciding with the project of the Sandinista Popular Revolution is that of '**participation**'.

This participation is not assumed as a form of demogagy making the workers believe they are participating. The aim is to ensure that they are generally the protagonists of the process and that they become educated and grow politically to exercise political power and, **under the guidance of their vanguard** ((emphases ours)) to be the subjects of their history. The requirement is that within this outlook the working class

and its members individually shape themselves in a critical, like-minded and combative manner as Sandinistas and also prepare themselves at the highest scientific and technical levels."

The strain between people determining their own goals and course of action, as against that decided by a vanguard that already knows what is in the best interests of the collectivity is also found in this passage (MED: 1986, 5): "Participation gathers, stimulates and develops all the experience, capacities and potentialities of working people for their own growth (cf. Insurrection, National Literacy Crusade, defense). Participation should also be understood as joint action with mass organizations (ORMAS) and other institutions. Practice has demonstrated that the people in arms, organized in a **structured manner** and taking its own decisions **under the guidance of the vanguard,** is invincible ((emphases ours)).

Our problem is that the mass organizations, which are the mechanisms for mobilizing the population around the tasks of the revolution, are also under great pressure to serve as forums for transmitting the political line being propounded by the FSLN at any given moment. This danger has been pointed out by Fagen et al (1986) with regard to not only Nicaragua but other revolutionary societies using a vanguard party strategy to develop rapidly and defend itself against external aggression. Marchetti (1986: 322), who has written extensively on agrarian reform and peasant organization in Nicaragua, comments on the "double character" of the mass organizations:

> On the one hand, the political activitists of the vanguard used the popular organizations as "seed beds" for combatants in the struggle against Somoza and later for political cadres in the state and the army. On the other hand, the popular organizations were born of and became powerful through the political activity of oppressed social forces concerned with solutions for their immediate needs. The defense of one's country is always the most immediate need and with the growing weight of the war the equilibrium of the mass organizations' dual character shifted heavily in favor of the "seed bed of the vanguard" concept.

In such situations, as Fagen et al (1986: 22) note "there is a strong temptation for the ((vanguard)) leadership to view itself as the sole representative of the popular classes, and consequently to downplay or repress autonomous mass action."

Even under such difficult circumstances there are numerous instances of spontaneous action by mass organizations and grassroots groups to express their concerns and protest policies which they believe prejudicial to their members. For example, the Rural Workers' Association (ATC) has organized sit-ins at government offices or state-run enterprises, when it believed that workers' rights were not being honored or promises being fulfilled. Perhaps the most interesting case of a mass organization articulating its interests, even at odds (in the short-run) with the FSLN

leadership, is that of the Nicaraguan Women's Association--AMNLAE. The following paragraphs discuss the general strategies AMNLAE has pursued with regard to the articulation of women's rights because these general directions in policy bear on the content and form of popular education activities.

AMNLAE's interest in advancing the rights and status of women is part of the strategic project of the revolution. It is frequently stated at the highest levels of the FSLN there is no revolution without women's emancipation. But the overall defense of the revolution also has meant that women's immediate concerns at times have had to be subordinated to the issues of national unity and survival, in the face of external attack and internal dissension. Molyneux (1982: 288) observes that "In the face of mounting pressure from U.S.-backed counterrevolutionaries in 1982, a further casualty of these difficulties appeared to be the Sandinista commitment to the emancipation of women. AMNLAE reduced its public identification with 'feminism' and spoke increasingly of the need to promote women's interests in the context of the wider struggle." But even as AMNLAE became actively involved in defending the revolution it was articulating its own views concerning what equality of the sexes meant. When the draft was instituted in 1983, AMNLAE opposed the initial draft law since it excluded women. A compromise was reached whereby women could volunteer for regular service. While a number of women are serving in the army, thousands more are participating in militia duty and civil defense activities.

On the issue of abortion, which the FSLN leadership has wished to downplay so as not to antagonize the conservative leadership of the Catholic Church, at a time when there is a need for national unity, AMNLAE, nonetheless, pressed forward in airing their demands. These demands included changing the law so as no longer make abortion a criminal offense, making abortion services readily available at public hospitals, and increasing the availability of family planning information and contraceptives. The debate took place, among other places, in the official newspaper of the FSLN, Barricada. The issue of abortion still remains an explosive one, with some demands being met (e.g., greater availability of birth control pills and more systematic attempts at sex education in the schools and through the mass organizations, but abortions still are not available in public facilities, at accessible prices, to most Nicaraguans).

While women's strategic interests have been advanced both specifically by legislation (concerning for example women's custody rights and men's obligations to contribute to household and childcare maintenance) and, more generally, by policies designed to help the poorest and most disadvantaged sectors of the society (of which women constitute a majority), Molyneux (1986: 298) points out contradictory aspects of AMNLAE's campaigns: "Many of the campaigns . . . were directed at resolving some of the practical problems women faced, as exemplified by their mother and child health care program, or by their campaign aimed at encouraging women to conserve domestic resources to make the family income stretch further and thus avoid pressure building up over wage

demands or shortages. A feature of this kind of campaign is its recognition of women's practical interests, but in accepting the division of labor and women's subordination within it, it may entail a denial of their strategic interests. This is the problem with many women's organizations in the socialist bloc."

Similarly, the war situation has not only brought women into new roles but also has reinforced the traditonal role of mother. In certain respects mothers, because of the draft and the casualties suffered by youth, are accorded more deference and social recognition than at any time in the past. Mother's Day in May is a major event in the school calendar. Yet, there are also marked differences between the pre- and post-revolutionary attitudes of women. Despite the initial resistance of many mothers to the draft, testimony after testimony indicates that the content of the traditional role has changed: mothers are among the most fervent supporters of the revolution and the need to struggle against external aggression (see, for example, Angel and Mactinosh, 1987).

Thus, the an analysis of women's role in a revolutionary society like Nicaragua does not fit easily with conventional analysis: as with other features of the revolutionary process, attempts to improve the status of women are characterized by contradictions and tensions. But problems may lead to transformations and new strategies to advance women's interests in the light of changing circumstances. The so-called tension between a strategy that emphasizes class interests of women (i.e., as the revolution resolves working class issues women will be better off) as against a feminist strategy (that explicitly attack women's immediate problems) has been addressed since 1986 by a policy on the part of AMNLAE and the FSLN that does not view the advance of women's interests as a zero-sum game in which men must lose or be put down . Rather than pushing confrontations between women and men in order to change men, the approach may be summarized as one in which women and men work together to win demands in the workplace, on farms, in schools, and in their communities. The strategy is to effect changes that will lead to greater equality in all institutional sectors of the society. But this strategy calls for joint effort on the part of men and women.

This strategy has bearing on the single-sex vs. mixed-sex question with regard to popular education programs or collective efforts to achieve greater social justice. AMNLAE, since 1986, has placed greater effort on getting women to join various mass organizations, unions, and cooperatives than on swelling its own membership. As noted above, the thesis is that changes wrought within and through these grassroots organizations will lead to improvements in the status of women in all spheres of activity.

Finally, a question that comes up with regard to funding and sponsorship of education programs in nonrevolutionary societies also merits consideration with regard to societies undergoing radical change. Even though mass organizations recognize the FSLN as a vanguard organization and are obligated in their constitutions to follow its lead, all of the mass organizations in Nicaragua are dependent on their own membership

dues and contributions to support their activities. In a country as poor and war ravaged as Nicaragua, this means that organizations such as the ATC or the CST may not even have sufficient funds to conduct weekend workshops for their membership on union history or how to more effectively run their organizations; they are too poor to pay transporation or meal expenses. In such cases, international assistance may be the only source of funding for such necessary popular education activities. A similar situation emerges in the other countries discussed in this paper. When an external agency provides funding for transporation or meals or initial start-up, there then emerges the question of continued dependency on the outside agency--but without such support there may by no workshop or program. Dilemmas posed by external assistance will continue so long as the war situation continues unabated in Nicaragua, and so long as the other countries described here continue to suffer from under- and distorted-development and pervasive poverty.

Conclusions

The impact of popular education programs has been discussed on a range of levels. On the individual level, personal development, self-esteem, and new skills can be developed. Families also benefit from the attainment of new abilities and options for family survival, and children whose mothers act as role models assuming a range of new responsibilities are positively affected.

On the group level, a sense of commonality, community and common purpose are forged. Popular education is instrumental in the development of collective projects for survival and improving living standards. These efforts provides the building blocks for continued organizing and networking on the community, regional and national levels, because they help build leadership skills and strengthen grassroots organizations.

Creating long-lasting impact on the national level by working to influence governmental policy and the legal system can also be an outcome of popular education work. When specialized areas like the law are demystified, individuals and groups who have a better understanding of how the system functions can more effectively work to alter it to serve their interests. In this area, however, the achievements of popular education are probably least visible, except in countries like Nicaragua which are undergoing radical social change.

In reformist societies, social movements and national organizations use education as a tool to affect change on the macro-level, but in most cases there is a need to forge more systematically linkages between local initiatives and national level policies and practices. These linkages assume a different form in revolutionary societies like Nicaragua, where a revolutionary vanguard party and mass organizations strive to maintain a balance between national leadership of a revolutionary process beset by external aggression and widespread participation of individuals through different community groups and workplace organizations to articulate and resolve their immediate needs.

The growing popular movement in Latin America over the last 15-20 years has resulted in the incorporation of new groups and the search for new methodologies. More egalitarian relations in the learning environment and organizations are an important precursor to greater social equality. No longer seen just within the domain of education, popular education work has gained legitimacy as a site for empowering marginalized social sectors and creating an ideology of challenge to dominant society -- a counterhagemony.

In revolutionary societies, democratic and effective mass organizations are essential to prevent authoritarian steering by a vanguard party and to ensure that the beneficiaries of transformations in society are also the primary shapers of those changes.

There is potential for popular education to serve as a permanant educational activity linked to the process of democratic development in society (Huidobro,1988:9). To truly incorporate women and their particular concerns, that democratization will have to also extend to daily life and the practices of community groups and national organizations in revolutionary as well as nonrevolutionary societies.

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